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SUBJECT: U.S.-BALTIC SUMMIT: CALMING TROUBLED WATERS

Classified By: Ambassador Steve Mull; Reason 1.4(d)

This is a joint message from Embassies Riga, Tallinn and
Vilnius.

Summary

1. (C) President Bush's meeting with the three Baltic presidents in Riga May 7 presents an extraordinary opportunity to tighten our alliance with America's best friends in Europe and patch their fraying unity in advancing U.S. interests. At the summit, we should aim to:

--Acknowledge the three's staunch support in fighting the war on terrorism and supporting the growth of democracy from Belarus through Iraq to Afghanistan (and offer, if available, additional military assistance in carrying out that fight);

--Defuse tensions over their differences on the May 9 events in Moscow by expressing understanding for each;

--Urge a constructive, forward-looking approach to relations with Russia;

--Promote the three's cooperation in exporting democracy to the former Soviet Union and beyond, charting their energy strategies, increasing economic cooperation, and battling transnational threats in crime and health; and

--Reiterate our support for the visa waiver roadmap process for all three.

End Summary.

America's Best Friends

2. (C) President Bush's decision to hold a summit meeting with his Baltic counterparts during his visit to Riga May 7 could not come at a better time. Recent tensions over whether to attend WWII commemorative ceremonies in Moscow have exacerbated destructive strains in each country's relationship with Moscow, while fraying unity among the three. Important parliamentary votes on future commitments to U.S. operations in Afghanistan and/or Iraq loom in each. And each has signaled a willingness to work closely with us as they become more outspoken in the European Union councils on issues of common interest.

3. (C) The Balts' occasional fractiousness and heightened sensitivity to Russia may have grabbed recent headlines, but neither feature detracts from their warm and strong alliance with the United States. Their leaders have steadfastly vowed to remain as long as necessary in Iraq. They have been strong supporters of continuing the EU's arms embargo on China, energizing greater support to democrats in the former Soviet Union, ending Sudan's civil war, and promoting human rights in Cuba. Each enthusiastically welcomes increased U.S. investment, which has found a small but profitable home in the region.

4. (C) Our principal challenge at the summit is to calm recent tensions that have emerged in the three's relations with Russia and with each other; tensions that, if left unchecked, could begin to imperil their strong support for U.S. global interests, invite internal political instability, and distract from our important agenda with Russia. President Bush can achieve this task because of the unique esteem and affection he enjoys among all three) no one on the world stage today carries greater weight and influence on these three leaders. We recommend the President concentrate on five key themes at the summit:

Gratitude for Support

5. (C) The Balts have been unshakable U.S. allies in advancing our most important global interests. Together, they have 251 troops on the ground in Iraq, and their parliaments are now at various stages of considering extension of their missions. Lithuania recently volunteered to lead NATO's

arguably most challenging Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghowr Province, for which Latvia has indicated tentative support, while the Estonians will support a British unit. The three have been stalwart allies in international organization, intelligence and law enforcement cooperation in the war against terrorism. In parallel, they have promoted the growth of freedom by supporting democrats across the former Soviet empire, most notably in Belarus, Ukraine and the South Caucasus. Gratitude from President Bush, both in his meetings and press appearances -- particularly if he is able to offer supplemental military assistance in bearing the costs of the operations -- would go far in cementing this continued valuable support of the U.S. global agenda.

Soothing May 9 Tensions

16. (C) The Balts' different responses to Russia's invitations to WWII commemorative ceremonies in Moscow have brought destructive strains to the fore in relations with Moscow and with each other. Adamkus has bitterly complained in private that by going to Moscow, Vike-Freiberga has shattered Baltic unity and is attempting to cast Latvia as the Baltic leader. Vike-Freiberga's criticism of Russia in explaining her decision to attend provoked sharp Russian resentment. Russia's Ambassador to Lithuania unleashed a domestic firestorm by attacking Lithuanians as "dirty scandal-mongers" and circulating disinformation that Lithuania is blocking Kaliningrad orphans from joining their adoptive Russian families. Meanwhile, Lithuania launched a crude campaign to move the venue of the proposed summit from Riga to Tallinn, to avoid creating an impression that the U.S. endorsed Latvia's approach to Russia.

17. (C) The anniversary of the Soviet Union's illegal annexation of the Baltic States is rightfully a painful one for all three. But each needs to approach it on the basis of its own interests, and respect the decision of the others. We recommend that President Bush defuse the demands to take a side on the issue by emphasizing our respect and support for each of the three decisions as in keeping with each country's interests; and by urging the three privately to remove it as a source of division.

A Constructive Relationship with Russia

18. (C) The May 9 fracas distracted the Balts from pursuing their common interest of establishing a constructive relationship with Russia. Once removing the anniversary as a source of discord, we recommend President Bush urge the three Presidents to redouble their efforts in promoting that common interest. Specifically, the President should:

--reiterate the ironclad guarantees that the NATO alliance provides for the security of all three in their relations with Russia;

--encourage the three to continue their progressive efforts to respect ethnic minority rights;

--urge their measured responses to the occasional political volatility and provocations emanating from Russia as we continue to encourage the strengthening of its democracy; and

--praise the Balts' constructive political-military cooperation with Russia, for example in recent successful Vienna Document inspections.

Baltic Unity

19. (C) The Balts are among Europe's smallest states, but together, their common values and ambitious foreign policies can magnify their supportive contributions to America's most important foreign policy interests. We recommend President Bush urge the three Baltic leaders to tighten their cooperation in a range of fields:

--Exporting Democracy: The Balts, as the most successful former Soviet republics, have special appeal to the rest of the former Soviet Union, and all three provide various assistance to them. President Bush should encourage their intensified cooperation, at least in parallel if not together, throughout the region, especially in neighboring Belarus. Further, the President should encourage their already successful efforts in support of democracy beyond the region, such as Lithuania's efforts to lead the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghowr Province in Afghanistan.

--Energy: NATO and EU membership accomplished the three's de jure integration with Europe overnight, but their nearly complete dependence on Russia for energy supplies will limit their de facto integration for the foreseeable future. We should encourage their common efforts to establish alternate energy supplies without endangering a mutually beneficial

arrangement with their Russian suppliers. For example, a lingering border dispute between Lithuania and Latvia, which their Economic Ministers recently recommitted to resolve, stands in the way of moving ahead on long-standing interests in further oil exploration in the Baltic.

--Economics/Business: The explosive economic growth all three have enjoyed in the past five years will require substantial foreign investment to continue; an opportunity that could benefit U.S. business. President Bush should encourage the three to intensify their cooperation among themselves and with us in attracting further American investment through pro-growth policies, building on the success of the two recent U.S.-Baltic investment conferences in London and Washington. As with democracy, the Balts lead the way in the former Soviet Union on economic reform. We should encourage them to share their experiences in implementing capitalism with other former Soviet republics, jointly and separately.

--Trans-National Problems: The Balts should continue to develop their cooperation in combating such transnational threats as HIV/AIDS, trafficking in persons and corruption.

Visa Waiver Roadmap

10. (C) The only irritant in our otherwise rosy bilateral relationships is our policy to require visas from Baltic travelers to visit their families in the United States, particularly in light of strong Baltic support for U.S. global objectives. Most Baltic officials acknowledge the practical difficulties of exempting their nationals from our visa requirements, but are nevertheless eager to show their constituents they are working the issue. Public opinion here enthusiastically greeted President Bush's announcement of support for the visa waiver roadmap process in February. We recommend he publicly reiterate his support for the process in the Baltic states as a means of winning substantial goodwill and continued support for U.S. policies.

Mull